DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 118 SO 006 447

AUTHOR Riffer, Roger L.
TITLE Determinants of University Students' Political Attitudes or Demythologizing Campus Political Activism.
SPONS AGENCY LeMoyne Coll., Memphis, Tenn.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Activism; Beliefs; *Educational Research; Higher Education; Parent Influence; Personal Values; Political Affiliation; *Political Attitudes; *Political Socialization; Questionnaires; Tables (Data)

ABSTRACT

Four general hypotheses concerning the sources of university students' political attitudes are presented and evaluated in this paper. A cross-sectional survey of American male Harvard University graduate students was conducted with a questionnaire dealing with attitudes toward United States involvement in Vietnam. Responses were analyzed by computer and relevant statistical tests were used to verify each hypothesis. The findings contribute to the understanding of the determinants of political attitudes and to the understanding of the relationship between students' political attitudes and their general values. An appendix includes tables of data compiled in the study. (SHM)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 083118

SP 006447

Determinants of University Students' Political Attitudes or Demythologizing Campus Political Activism[1]

Dr. Roger L. Riffer, LeMoyne College

Why is it that numbers of American university students at prestige institutions tend to express political attitudes which indicate strongly negative feelings toward governmental policies? A number of explanations have been suggested (see, for example, Halleck, 1968). However, scientific evidence has rarely provided the basis for these suggestions. Hence, this paper's objective is to present a critical evaluation of four general hypotheses concerning the sources of university student's political attitudes.

A first general hypothesis is that students' political attitudes are determined directly by their parents (cf., Newcomb, 1943). Actually, almost everyone agrees that parents have a strong impact upon their children's political socialization. However, there are at least three alternative ideas about what it is that parents do that causes their children to develop negative feelings toward their government.

Parents are frequently said to be too lax and permissive, allowing their sons and daughters to "go to pot." Such permissiveness is seen as spoiling the children, turning them into bratish upstarts who feel little respect for authority including that of their government.

Alternatively, parents are also frequently said to be so strict and moralistic that when their sons and daughters go off to college and get

---

1 This paper is based on work done in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, Harvard University while on an ESEA Research Training Fellowship. In addition, the LeMoyne College Faculty Research Committee has generously provided support for this paper.

away from home for the first time, they burst forth in "adolescent rebellion." Hence, in attempting to free themselves from their parents' authority, students become frustrated with every authority, again including their government.

A third alternative is that students tend to share the political attitudes of their parents regardless of the other values their parents have emphasized. If this reasoning is correct, then university students are simply more visible than their parents. If one were to put their parents together on a university campus, then they would also be strongly negative in their feelings toward governmental policies. Campus political activism is simply the consequence of the fact that universities draw their students from families that are unrepresentative of society at large.

A second general hypothesis stems from certain ideas developed by Richard Flacks. In his article, "The Liberated Generation: An Exploration of the Roots of Student Protest" (1967), Flacks suggests that a major determinant of students' political attitudes is the extent to which the values emphasized in the students' homes while they were growing up tend to mesh with the values of the "dominant occupational sphere." Flacks bases his reasoning on Parsons who said:

> Subconscious subcultures and movements among adolescents tend to develop when there is a sharp disjunction between the values and expectations embodied in the traditional families in a society and the values and expectations prevailing in the occupational sphere (1967, p. 59).

Parsons was referring to a phenomenon he found in several "developing" nations; Flacks argues that it is to be found in "developed" nations as well. He writes that, because of the increased affluence of the United States and because of other historical reasons such as wider access to

higher education and the influence of such men as Dr. Spock, there has been emerging a new subculture among American upper-middle class families. This new subculture is characterized by its emphasis on certain familial relationships and basic humane values. In particular,

> (a) a strong emphasis on democratic, egalitarian interpersonal relations
>
> (b) a high degree of permissiveness with respect to self-regu lation
>
> (c) an emphasis on values other than achievenent; in particular, a stress on the intrinsic worth of living up to intellectual, aesthetic, political, or religious ideals (1967, p. 60).

These family relationships and emphases, Flacks suggests, produce students who hold values that differ from and conflict with the values of the American occupational sphere.

> Our view (is) of the student movement as an expression of deep discontent felt by certain types of high status youth as they confront the incongruities between the values represented by the authority and occupational structure of the larger society and the values inculcated by their families and peer culture. (1967, p. 72)

A third general hypothesis stresses the interrelation between students and the government itself. Similar to the idea that parents have spoiled their children, this assertion is that students oppose all governmental policies that make demands upon them. For example, students oppose military policy in Vietnam, not as a matter of principle, but simply because they are lazy or cowardly and hence do not want to fulfill their military obligation. According to this reasoning, students who face the prospect of being drafted would tend to be more negative in their attitudes toward governmental policies than would students who for whatever reasons are not facing that prospect.

And a fourth general hypothesis is based on an idea popular in some circles, namely, that there are agents withing the university setting who influence the attitudes of the students, creating their anti-governmental political attitudes. Depending upon who is advocating this idea, these agents are said to be 1) faculty, 2) fellow students, and/or 3) outside agitators. If this idea is correct, then one would expect that as students spend time under the influence of these agents, i.e., as they spend time at the university, they would become increasingly negative toward governmental policies.

Method

Each of these ideas was framed as a hypothesis and operationally defined. Then a cross-sectional survey was conducted with a questionnaire. Responses were analyzed by computer and relevant statistical tests were used to verify each hypothesis.

Sample

The data were gathered February 12-16, 1968, by a poll of the American male Harvard University students enrolled in the Graduate Schools of Education, Divinity, Law, Arts and Sciences, and Engineering and Applied Sciences. Altogether, 1034 American male students (approximately 25%) came to one of the seven polling booths and filled out the questionnaire. (American females and foreign students were omitted because of suspected differences from American males in the sources of their political attitudes.

Clearly the respondents to this poll do not constitute a random sample of all university students. Hence, the conclusions reached in this paper are tentative. Nevertheless, the subjects do represent an important

and highly visible segment of one university's population.[2]

Results

The political attitude selected for this study was a particularly salient one at the time: response to United States involvement in South Vietnam. Factor analysis of 23 different items related to United States involvement in Vietnam yielded a single dimension (see Appendix).

A. Parents

The data strongly support the hypothesis that fathers' political attitudes determine the attitudes of their sons toward governmental policies

---

[2] Compared to a national sample of all graduate students (ACE, 1969) including masters' candidates and students in the generally more conservative areas of health (medicine, etc.) and business, the sample in this study was somewhat more left of center, more Jewish and less Roman Catholic, less supportive of Nixon compared to a Democratic Presidential candidate, and from families with somewhat greater years of schooling for each parent (see tables below).

STUDENTS' POLITICAL ORIENTATION FOR A HARVARD SAMPLE AND A NATIONAL SAMPLE

	Students' Political Orientation			
	Left	Moderate	Right	Total
Harvard	56%	29%	15%	100%
National	45%	26%	28%	100%
Difference	11%	3%	13%	

STUDENTS' PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE

	Nixon	Humphrey[a]	Johnson[a]	Neither	Total
Harvard	19%	-	45%	35%	100%
National	35%	43%	-	17%	100%

[a] The Harvard sample collect in February, 1968, matched Nixon versus Johnson; the national sample, collected in 1969, matched Nison versus Humphrey.

such as those related to Vietnam (gamma = .23; $p < .0001$; see Table 1). The more liberal the father's political point of view (according to his son), the more his son's response toward the government's Vietnam policies tend to be "dovish." Of the respondents with very liberal fathers, 44% were among the most dovish quartile (compared to 18% of the respondents with very conservative fathers) whereas 12% were among the least

TABLE 1

STUDENT'S VIETNAM PREDISPOSITION BY HIS FATHER'S POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW[a]

Vietnam predisposition	Father's political point of view					
	Very conservative	Conservative	Middle of the road	Liberal	Very liberal	Total
Least dovish	31.9%	31.1%	32.2%	21.4%	11.9%	25.7%
Somewhat dovish	29.8	25.2	21.1	23.5	13.9	22.5
Dovish	20.2	24.3	22.6	29.8	30.5	26.0
Most dovish	18.1	19.4	24.1	25.2	43.7	25.9
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	94	222	199	238	151	904

Chi square = 57.7 / 12 d.f., (p .0001).

[a] A higher mean score indicates a more "dovish" Vietnam predisposition.

dovish quartile (compared with 32% of the sons of very conservative fathers).

As for the idea that parents' permissiveness causes student discontent, factor analysis of ten home value emphases did result in a dimension which is related to permissiveness (see Appendix). Items loading heavily on this factor include ones concerning diligence, strict morals, accumulation of material goods, and church attendance. This factor was found to be related to the fathers' political attitudes but not to those of the students themselves. Strict parents tend to be politically conservative ($r = .31^{***}$), but the strictness has no effect upon the sons' political attitudes.

And as for "adolescent rebellion," the relationship between fathers' and sons' political attitudes, as previously reported, was strongly positive, indicating no support for the idea. A third variable analysis was performed to test whether the relationship between fathers' and sons' political attitudes was related to the educational attainment of the fathers. It could be that just the students who are upwardly mobile tend to be rebellious. However, regardless of fathers' years of schooling, no relationship was found to be negative -- indicating that "rebellion" is not a significant determinant of students' political attitudes, regardless of the extent of intergenerational social mobility.

B. Articulation of Values with Those of the Occupational Sphere

On the basis of Flacks' ideas about the "articulation" (or correspondence) of students' basic occupational values with the values of the dominant occupational sphere, ten occupational values were measured (from

Rosen berg, as adapted by Mason, 1961). As hypothesized, three factors were found by factor analysis: 1) extrinsic rewards, 2) social rewards, and 3) self-actualization rewards (see Appendix). Support was found for two of these factors as determinants of students' political attitudes. Specifically, the more a student valued extrinsic rewards (assumed to articulate with the values of the dominant occupational sphere), the less dovish was his response to United States' involvement in Vietnam (gamma = .27; $p < .0001$; see Table 2). Similarly, the more a student valued self-actualization rewards (assumed not to articulate with the values of the dominant occupational sphere), the more dovish was his response (gamma = -.19; $p < .0001$; see Table 3). No significant relationship was found be-

TABLE 2

STUDENT'S VIETNAM PREDISPOSITION BY HIS VALUATION OF EXTRINSIC REWARDS[a]

Vietnam predisposition	Extrinsic rewards				
	Very high	High	Some-what	Least high	Total
Very dovish	12.5%	19.3%	28.9%	37.5%	24.6%
Dovish	22.9	23.5	26.8	25.4	24.7
Somewhat dovish	28.7	26.9	22.8	21.2	24.9
Least dovish	35.8	30.3	21.5	15.8	25.8
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	240	238	246	240	964

[a] Chi square = 61.7 / 9 d.f., ($p < .0001$). Gamma = .273.

TABLE 3

STUDENT'S VIETNAM PREDISPOSITION BY HIS VALUATION OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION REWARDS[a]

Vietnam predisposition	Self-actualization rewards				
	Very high	High	Some-what	Least high	Total
Very dovish	32.9%	26.9%	22.5%	16.2%	24.6%
Dovish	26.2	24.4	27.5	20.7	24.7
Somewhat dovish	21.1	25.2	25.8	27.4	24.9
Least dovish	19.8	23.6	24.2	35.7	25.8
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	237	242	244	241	964

[a] Chi square = 32.2 / 9 d.f., ($p < .0001$). Gamma = -.188.

tween the respondents' evaluation of social rewards and their feelings about issues related to Vietnam. This lack of relationship perhaps is due to the fact that the dominant occupational sphere emphasizes both a Darwinian disregard for one's competitors and at the same time a high regard for service to one's country (e.g., military service). In sum, a students' ratings of extrinsic and self-actualization rewards were found to be important determinants of their response to governmental polities, thus providing some support for Flacks' ideas.

C. Draft Status

The idea that students resent military service and on that basis

oppose governmental policies was tested both objectively (draft status) and subjectively (perceived susceptibility). In neither case was the variable found to be related to students' attitudes about American involvement in Vietnam. In the first case, this was due in part to a lack of variance in the sample since nearly two thirds of the respondents had either a student or an occupational deferment. In the second case, there was no relationship because students who considered it unlikely that they would face military service included both dovish types such as divinity school students and C.O.'s and hawkish types such as veterans and members of R.O.T.C. or the military reserves. And those who expected to face military service, likewise included some who apparently dreaded the idea and others who seemed to look forward to it.[3] Thus, regardless of whether vulnerability to military service was operationally defined as Selective Service classification or as perceived susceptibility, no relationship was found between it and students' political attitudes.

D. School-related Agents

There is no support for the idea that the students' political attitudes were influenced by school-related agents. The number of years a student had been enrolled in his degree program was unrelated to any of the 23 items related to governmental policies concerning Vietnam. Also, the strength of the relationship between fathers' and sons' political attitudes was unrelated to the number of years the student had been en-

---

[3] The female respondents who were not included in the study's sample were considerably more dovish than the males suggesting that susceptibility to the draft cannot be the only source of anti-war sentiments.

rolled. If Harvard has a number of students who tend to disagree with governmental policies (and it does), it is not because of Harvard itself (its faculty, students, or subversive agents) but is because of Harvard's attraction for students who already disapprove of their government's policies. Those who contend that schooling "subverts" or radicalizes students receive no support from the data collected for this study.

Conclusion

Altogether, empirical evidence indicates that students' response to governmental policies are determined in part by their fathers' political orientation and by the extent to which their occupational values (extrinsic and self-actualization rewards) "articulate" with those of the dominant occupational sphere. [A multiple regression analysis disclosed that each of these factors was an important determinant.] No support was found for "adolescent rebellion," "permissiveness," draft susceptibility, or school-related agents as determinants of students' political attitudes.

The significance of these findings rests principally in their contribution to the understanding of the determinants of political attitudes of American male university students. Secondarily, it contributes to the understanding of the relationship between students' political attitudes and their general values.

Appendix

PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS FACTOR LOADINGS FOR VIETNAM PREDISPOSITION

Question	Variable description	Vietnam predisposition
G-b	A victory in South Vietnam is vital to the long term interests of the United States.	.818
F-a	I would support the move to escalate the military effort in South Vietnam, if President Johnson deemed it necessary.	.810
G-c	A victory in South Vietnam for the United States would be immoral and unjust.	-.807
H-a	The use of napalm in Vietnam by the United States is fully justified.	.805
H-c	The bombing of urban areas of North Vietnam is justified by the fact that the North Vietnamese are the aggressors in South Vietnam.	.786
G-a	A victory in South Vietnam is vital to United States' security.	.781
D	Concerning research contracts relevant to the conflict in Vietnam: Harvard should not accept such contracts.	-.761
I-e	I will do all that I legally can to avoid having to serve in the armed forces so long as the conflict in Vietnam continues.	-.712
F-c	All in all, President Johnson has been handling the Vietnam conflict about as well as could realistically be expected.	.707
F-b	President Johnson has repeatedly and willfully misrepresented the actual situation in Vietnam to the American people.	-.683
I-a	The present laws on draft resistance are unfair and unjust.	-.649
K-b	Peace ought to come to South Vietnam only when . . .	.646

Question	Variable description	Vietnam predisposition
L-b	In general, the United States military strategy in Vietnam ought to be . . .	.642
J-b	The United States ought to enter into negotiations about a peace settlement with the Hanoi government only when . . .	.592
E	Harvard University as an institution should take a stand on the Vietnam conflict.	-.587
N	Concerning recruitment on Harvard's campus . . .	.497
L-a	In general, the United States military strategy in South Vietnam will be to . . .	-.423
K-a	Peace will come to South Vietnam only when . . .	.369
I-c	Humanities graduate students are as vital to the national defense as are physical science students.	-.337
H-b	Under no circumstances should the United States use nuclear weapons except if they were being used by the enemy first.	-.275
F-d	President Johnson is to be condemned for the weakness he has shown in dealings with North Korea over the U.S.S. Pueblo.	.268
J-a	The United States will enter into negotiations about a peace settlement with the Hanoi government only when . . .	-.215
I-d	It was clearly unfair that some men could avoid the draft altogether by staying in school until they were 26 years old.	.096
I-b	I probably will face induction into the armed forces in the next year.	-.026

PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS FACTOR LOADINGS
FOR PARENTS' VALUE EMPHASES

Variable description	Poetic	Puritan	(3)	(4)
High achievement	.396	.419	-.608	-.188
Asthetic	.682	-.259	-.079	.245
Honesty	.437	.336	.402	-.500
Books and ideas	.752	-.202	-.178	-.061
Diligence	.348	.655	-.227	-.286
Sympathy	.616	-.057	.400	.143
Self-expression	.729	.147	-.053	.351
Strict morals	.057	.751	.288	.206
Accumulation	-.210	.493	-.541	.384
Church attendance	-.014	.629	.441	.320
Sums of squares	2.458	2.054	1.353	.867

ROTATED FACTOR LOADINGS FOR STUDENT VALUATIONS OF OCCUPATIONAL REWARDS

Variable description	Extrinsic	Social	Self-actualization
Be helpful	.055	.831	.000
Use abilities	.093	.174	.515
Work with people	.171	.661	.055
Have secure future	.484	-.063	.025
Be creative	.063	.053	.703
Have power	.802	.072	-.070
Have high status	.861	-.000	-.000
Be of service	.307	.743	-.017
Make money	.776	-.245	-.003
Have growth	.112	.201	.699
Have freedom	.119	-.044	.703
Sums of squares	2.386	1.825	1.751

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The American Graduate Student: A Normative Description. American Council on Education, 1971 (as quoted in The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 22, 1971).

Flacks, Richard. "The Liberated Generation: An Exploration of the Roots of Student Protest," Journal of Social Issues, 23, (July, 1967), 52-75.

Halleck, S. L. "Hypotheses of Student Unrest," Phi Delta Kappan, 40, (September, 1968), 2-8.

Mason, Ward. The Beginning Teacher. Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1961.

Newcomb, Theodore M. Personality and Social Change. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1943.

Parsons, Talcott. "Youth in the Context of American Society," in Erik Erikson (ed.), The Challenge of Youth. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1965, 110-141.

Riffer, Roger L. "Determinants of University Students' Political Attitudes and Presidential Preference: A Theoretical Model." Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1970.